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RWANDA

I. CURRENT POINT OF ISSUE

- o How best to respond to criticism that the U.S. and international community were slow to react to the Rwanda crisis?

II. BACKGROUND/STATUS OF ISSUE

- o With the Rwandan refugee death toll mounting, there is increasing criticism that the international community, and the U.S. in particular, should have foreseen the humanitarian crisis and reacted more quickly.
- o Although the scale and speed of the refugee outflow would have been difficult to predict, the risk of outflows of refugees was well-known. It was for this very reason that we repeatedly urged the RPF to halt its military advance and call a cease-fire. At the same time, we were pushing for rapid deployment of UNAMIR to stabilize the situation and reassure the population.
- o Relief organizations had planned and prepositioned supplies for an outflow of up to 500,000 refugees. However, they were not in a position to predict or respond to over one million refugees in such a short time frame. Once the crisis hit, it was clear only military assistance could meet the additional overwhelming demand.

III. KEY POINTS TO MAKE

- o As you have seen, there has been criticism in the press of what some perceive to be the slow response to the Rwanda crisis, with some saying we should have foreseen the humanitarian disaster.
- o We need to counter these misperceptions. Of course, no one could have predicted the enormous magnitude or unprecedented speed of the outflow. Moreover, while additional refugee outflows may have been expected, we were already working hard to prevent them, through demarches on the RPF for a cease-fire, efforts to speed deployment of UNAMIR, and close monitoring of the situation.
- o Our reaction since the crisis began has been outstanding, in both speed and scope, including the immediate dispatch of Brian Atwood, the DoD/State/OFDA assessment team, logistical aid, and rapid shipment of food and water purification units. We need to get this good word around.

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